

The Feminist Movement And The Muslim Woman

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The most radical movement in recent times which is revolutionizing the whole social structure and changing the entire basis of human relationships is the Feminist movement, popularly known as the drive for Women's Liberation.

The Feminist movement is not a unique product of the modern age. Its historical precedents reach back into antiquity. In his Republic, Plato advocated the abolition of the family and social roles determined by sex; in literature, the ancient Greek classical comedy, Lypsistrata and much marc recently, Henrick Ibsen's (1828-1906) drama, A Doll's House preached feminist ideals. The Victorian economist and philosopher, John Stuart Mill and the German socialist, Friedrich Engels in his essay, The Subjection of Women, which he wrote in 1869, laid the core foundations of Feminism. In 1884 Angels publicly proclaimed marriage as a "dreary mutation of slavery," urged its abolition and suggested public responsibility for the rearing of children.

In America, Feminism was the outgrowth of the movement for the abolition of slavery and the Temperance movement for the legal banning of liquor. Women who joined these organizations soon discovered that to make their cause effective, they required political power. The historical milestone of the Feminist movement was the Seneca Falls Convention in 1948 which in its manifesto, demanded women's rights to her complete control over her property and the he right to divorce her husband, guardianship of the children and an end to sexual discrimination in employment along with the right to receive equal pay with men for the same work, and most important, female franchise. As the campaign for women's suffrage grew, the more conservative Feminists limited their cause to the single issue of suffrage. In 1920 with the passage of the 19th amendment to the American constitution giving women the vote, the majority of women activists as 'well, as the public assumed that with female franchise, women's rights had been fully obtained. After this, the Feminist movement lay dormant for more then than forty years.

On December 14, 1961, President John F. Kennedy signed an Executive order establishing the President's Commission on the status of women. Its mandate was "to examine and recommend remedies to combat the prejudices and obsolete customs and morals which act as obstacles to the complete realization of women's rights." The President's Commission was the first official body ever to examine the status of in the United States.

Thus the "silent fifties" came to an abrupt end with the beginnings of Feminist confrontation politics in the early 1960's – marches, pickets and sit-ins. College and university girls began to participate in these political activities.

In contrast to the women who assembled at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and merely protested against the ill-treatment and abuse of women by drunken husbands and achievement of their legitimate rights in marriage, control of property and earnings and equal pay with men for the same work, the demands of the modern successors are far more radical. In the largest most enthusiastic Feminist demonstration ever held, on August 26, 1970, hundreds of women marched down Fifth Avenue, New York City carrying placards which read:

HOUSEWIVES ARE UNPAID SLAVES! STATE PAY FOR HOUSEWORK! OPPRESSED WOMEN! DON'T COOK DINNER! STARVE YOUR HUSBAND TONIGHT! END HUMAN SACRIFICE! DON'T GET MARRIED! WASHING DIAPERS IS NOT FULFILLING! LEGALIZE ABORTION! DEPENDENCY IS NOT HEALTHY STATE OF BEING!

Today's Feminists are implacably opposed to any social roles being determined by sex. Feminists assert the absolute and unqualified equality of men and women, not withstanding anatomical differences. They deny that there is any inherent biological distinction between men and women on the basis of sex which determines that the wife should be the housewife and mother and the husband the breadwinner and authoritarian head of the family. They believe that women should take just as active role in sexual intercourse as men and not be passive. They demand the abolition of institutional marriage, home and family, asset complete female sexual freedom and that the upbringing should be a public responsibility. They insist that all women should be given the right to complete control over their reproductive lives. They are demanding that all restrictions must be lifted from laws governing contraception so that devices can be publicly advertised and available over the druggist counter to any women regardless of her age and marital status and purchasable without a doctor's prescription. All laws restricting abortion should be removed and that women have a legal right to abortion at any stage of pregnancy. Abortions should not only be available at demand but should be supplied free by the state to any women who wants one so that the poor can take full advantage of facility.

In schools all course must be equally co-educational – home economics must no be exclusively female and shop mechanics for boys. Segregation must be broken down in gymnasiums and physical education. Girls should be allowed to compete in all sports and physical exercises with boys at all ages. All mass-media must be radically changed to eliminate sex-stereotyping roles and portray women as equal to men in all fields of work and production. Children's books are criticized by feminists because they do not show in their stories more single-parent families, unmarried mothers and divorces women as models for the children. Girls should be given mechanical toys to play with and boys should be given dolls. Instead of traditional institutions of marriage, home and family, radical Feminists propose men and women living in large communes where the welfare and rearing of the children would be public responsibility. They are demanding that child-care centers are made available to parents on a 24-hour basis provided to the public as free on demand just as parks, libraries and recreational facilities are taken for granted in most American communities. Women must be financially independent and no profession or occupation should be banned to her on account of her sex.

A lot of women who may say that they just want to play the traditional roles are simply fearful - or unable to imagine other ways of being. Old roles can seem to offer a certain security. Freedom can seem frightening especially if one has learned how to achieve a certain degree of power inside prison. Perhaps they are just afraid of choices. We don't seek to impose anything on women but merely to open up all possible alternatives. We do seek choice as one of the functions, which makes people human beings. We want to be full people, crippled neither by law or custom or our own-chained minds. If there us no room in that in nature, then nature must be changed![1]

One of the "alternative choices" for women the Feminists seek to make socially acceptable is Lesbianism (female homosexuality). One of the branches of feminism is the homophile organization known as The Daughters of Bilitis the aim of which is to promote Lesbianism.

The women's liberation movement has members who were lesbians before its existence and those who have become lesbians since their involvement with the movement. For some of the latter, Lesbianism is a form of political protest. Say the radical feminists. "Lesbianism is one road to freedom - freedom from oppression by men."[2]

The Lesbian minority in America, which may run as high at ten million women, is a woman, who is drawn erotically to women rather than to men. Perhaps the most logical and least hysterical of all statements about homosexuality is the following by Dr. Joel Fort psychiatrist and public health specialist and Dr. Joe K. Adams, psychologist and former mental health officer. The statement made in August 1966 is as follows: "Homosexuals like heterosexuals should be treated as individual human beings and not as a special group either by law or social agencies or employers. Laws governing sexual behavior should be reformed to deal only with clearly anti-social behavior involving violence or youth. The sexual behavior of individual adults by mutual Consent in private should not be a matter of public concern.[3]

What is the end-result of the radical feminist movement? What kind of society does Women's Liberation seek to attain?

Thus women for men are alternatively angels and slaves to be worshipped one minute and spurned and exploited the next but seldom treated as equals. Concerning sex, our society has taught total abstinence for the first decade of sexual maturity (even masturbation is considered at best an unavoidable evil,) then life-long fidelity to one partner. All the while society does its best both to keep us ignorant and confused about what a well developed sex-life can be and to convince us that the forbidden fruits of promiscuity surpass anything the "moral' person can ever taste. What a bundle of paradoxes! If instead we could face without flinching our homosexual impulses and curiosity about how this or that act with such a person might feel, then we might be able to distinguish between an impulse which is immoral and involuntary and action which of course must be taken deliberately in accordance with its likely consequences and our overall values and goals. What would happen if men rejected the male stereotype and acknowledged the values of oneness, humility, discussion, consideration, cooperation and compromise along with humility, respectful disagreement and conflict. We would not deny the richness of our sexual imagination nor the natural sexual element in all relationships. Just how it occurs-talking, touching, dancing or making love should be our guilt-free choice based on our own honest needs rather than a "moral" "masculine" stereotype.

What about the question of "fidelity" to one partner versus a diverse sex-life? Most adults seem to need to have a primary relationship, which comes before all others. If a problem in the primary relationship, which is the most demanding but also the most potentially rewarding kind, makes us try to escape through an outside flirtation or "affair," this is bad not because of the sexual acts committed but because it is an escape. The problem remains unsolved.

All our relationships tend to be over-reserved. We need to loosen up and learn to express affection-

openly and physically. Would men's and women's liberation of the sort I have just described destroy the traditional American family? I think so. It is an institution with many drawbacks. Considerations of efficiency and economy and exposure to the difficulties and opportunities inherent in larger groups living and working together make it a good idea to experiment with some "communal" kinds of arrangement.[4]

In Muslim countries, fortunately, the Feminist movement has not yet touched such extremes as this but as a result of westernization, Purdah is rapidly disappearing and women, revolting against their traditional roles, are patterning their lives more and more am the models of their Western sisters.

In the more fashionable and well-to-do urban classes, particularly in Tehran, the women spend less time in household work and more in social, professional, recreational and philanthropic activities. To go to the dress-maker or the hair-dresser, to have morning coffee or lunch with friends, to shop and attend parties, these constitute the daily routine for such women. They also enjoy taking meals in fine restaurants, going on holidays and engaging in sports. An increasing number of women of this class take an interest in cultural and charitable work. (p. 77)

In the cities of Lebanon, women are increasingly seen outside the home. On Sundays there are as many women as men on the crowded beaches of Beirut - the younger generation, of course. Beach behavior undoubtedly is a symbol of the loosening of bonds. In Lebanon the acceptance of Western dress styles has reached a stage where among the westernized middle and upper classes, there is little restraint even on those girls who wish to dress provocatively. In all social groups girls display a tremendous preoccupation with clothes and they are not usually casual clothes except for beach wear or picnics. In the winter suits are worn but in summer the standard garb for the university girl is a tight silk dress or skirt and a more or less transparent blouse. High heels and nylon stockings are standard and make-up is elaborate. Some Muslim girls (not university students) wear a completely transparent symbolic veil over their faces. A few years ago, girls were shy about being seen on the beaches with bathing suits, especially in a bikini. Now they take it in their stride and many wear scanty two-piece bathing suits. (pp. 122-123)[5]

Feminism is an unnatural, artificial and abnormal product of contemporary social disintegration, which in turn is the inevitable result of the rejection of all transcendental, absolute moral and spiritual values. The student of anthropology and history can be certain of the abnormality of the Feminist movement because all human cultures that we know of throughout prehistorically and historic times make a definite clear-cut distinction between "masculinity" and "femininity" and pattern the social roles of men and women accordingly. The disintegration of the home and family, the loss of the authoritarian role of the father and sexual promiscuity have been directly responsible for the decline and fall of every nation which these evils become prevalent.

Some may argue that if this is so, why is Western civilization so extraordinarily vigorous and dynamic and despite its decadence and moral corruption, still unchallenged in its world-domination?

When moral depravity, self-worship and sensual indulgence have touched extremes; when men and women, young and old have become lost in sexual craze; when men have been completely perverted by sexual excitements, the natural consequences leading a nation to total collapse will inevitably follow. People who witness the progress and prosperity of such declining nations, which indeed stand on the very brink of an abyss of fire, are led to conclude that their self-indulgence is not impeding their progress but accelerating it. They think that a nation is at the peak of its prosperity when its people are highly self-indulgent. But this is a sad conclusion. When the constructive and destructive forces are both working side by side and the constructive aspect on the whole seems to have an edge over the destructive aspect, it is wrong to

count the latter among the factors leading to the former.

Take, for instance, the case of a clever merchant who is earning high profits by dint of his intelligence, hard-work and experience. But at the same time, if he is given to drink, gambling and leads a care-free life, will it not be misleading to regard that side of his life as contributing to his well-being and prosperity? As a matter of fact, the first set of qualities is helping him to prosper whereas the second set is pulling him down. If on account of the positive qualities, he is flourishing, it does not mean that the negative forces are ineffective. It may be that the devil of gambling brings his whole fortune to naught in a moment and it may be that the devil of drinking leads him to commit a fatal mistake rendering him bankrupt and it may be that the devil of sexual indulgence leads him to commit murder, suicide or some other calamity. One cannot imagine how prosperous and triumphant he would have been had he not fallen a prey to these evils.

Similarly is the case with a nation. In the beginning it receives an impetus from constructive forces but then, due to lack of proper guidance, it begins to gather round it the means of its own destruction. For a while the constructive forces drag it along under the momentum already gained. But the destructive forces that are working simultaneously weaken it so much that one stray shock can send it sprawling to its doom.[6]

Where can salvation for humanity be found?

From the point of view of social structure, the teachings of the Shariah emphasize the role of the family as the unit of society - the family in the extended sense and not in its atomized, nuclear modem form. The greatest social achievement of the Prophet in Medina was precisely in breaking the existing tribal bonds and substituting religious ones which were connected on the one hand with the totality of the Muslim community and on the other hand with the family. The Muslim family is the miniature of the whole of Muslim society and its firm basis. In it, the man or father functions as the Imam in accordance with the patriarchal nature of Islam. The religious responsibility of the family rests upon his shoulders. In the family, the father upholds the tenets of the faith and his authority symbolizes that of God in the world. The man is in fact respected in the family precisely because of the sacerdotal function that he fulfills. The rebellion of Muslim women in certain quarters of Islamic society came when men themselves ceased to fulfill their religious function and lost their virile and patriarchal character. By becoming themselves effeminate, they caused the reaction of revolt among certain women who no longer felt the authority of religion upon themselves.

The traditional family is also the unit of stability of society and the four wives that a Muslim can marry, like the four-sided Ka'aba, symbolize this stability. Many have not understood why such a family structure is permitted in Islam and attack Islam for it as if polygamy belongs to Islam alone. Here and again Muslim modernism carries with it the pre-judice of Christianity against polygamy to the extent that some have gone even so far as to call it immoral and prefer promiscuity to a social pattern which minimizes all illicit relations to the extent possible. The problem of the attitude of the Western observer is not as important as that segment of modernized Muslim society which itself cannot understand the teachings of the Shariah on this point simply because it uses as criteria categories borrowed from the modern West.

There is no doubt that in a small but significant segment of Muslim society today, there is a revolt of women against traditional Islamic society. In every civilization a reaction always comes against an existing force or action. In Islam, the very patriarchal and masculine nature of the tradition makes the revolt of those women who have become aggressively modernized more violent and virulent than, let us say, in Hinduism, where the maternal element has always been strong. What many modernized Muslim women are doing in rebelling against the traditional Muslim family structure is to rebel against fourteen centuries of Islam itself although many may not be aware of the inner forces that drive them on. It is the patriarchal nature of Islam that makes the reaction of some

modernized women today so vehement. Although very limited in number, they are, in fact, more than Muslim men, thirsting for all things Western. They seek to become modernized in their dress and habits with impetuosity, which would be difficult to understand unless one considers the deep psychological factors involved.

From the Islamic point of view, the question of the equality of men and women is meaningless. It is like discussing the equality of a rose and a jasmine. Each has its own perfume, color, shape and beauty. Men and women are not the same. Each has particular features and characteristics. Women are not equal to men. But neither are men equal to women. Islam envisages their roles in society not as competing but as complimentary. Each has certain duties and functions in accordance with his or her nature and constitution.

Man possesses certain privileges such as social authority and mobility against which he has to perform many heavy duties. First of all, he bears all economic responsibility. It is his duty to support his family completely even if his wife is rich and despite the fact that she is economically independent. A woman in a traditional Islamic society does not have to worry about earning a living. There is always a family completely even if his wife is rich and despite die fact that she is economically independent. A woman in traditional Islamic society does not have to worry about earning a living. There is always the larger family structure in which she can find a place and take refuge from social and economic pressures even if she has no husband or father. In the extended family system, a man often supports not only his wife and children but also his mother, sister, aunts, in-laws and sometimes even cousins and more distant relatives. Therefore in city life, the necessity of having to find a job at all costs and having to bear the economic pressure of life is lifted from the shoulders of women. As for the countryside, the family is itself the economic unit and the work is achieved by the larger family or tribal unit together.

Secondly, a woman does not have to find a husband for herself. Site does not have to display her charms and make the thousand and one plans through which she hopes to attract a future mate. The terrible anxiety of having to find a husband and of missing the opportunity if one does not try hard enough at the right moment is spared the Muslim woman. Being able to remain true to her nature, she can afford to sit at home and wait for her parents or guardian to choose a suitable match. This usually leads to a marriage which, being based on the sense of religious duty and enduring family and social bonds between the two sides, is more lasting arid ends much more rarely in divorce than the marriages which are based on the sentiments of the moment that often do not develop into more permanent relationships.

Thirdly the Muslim woman is spared direct military and political responsibility although in rare cases there have been women warriors. This point may appear as a deprivation to some but in the light of the real needs of feminine nature, it is easy to see that for most women, such duties weigh heavily upon them. Even in modern societies, which through the equalitarian process have tried to equate men and women as if there were no difference in the two sexes, Women are usually spared the military draft except in extreme circumstances.

In return for these privileges which the woman receives, she has also certain responsibilities of which the most important is to provide a home for her family and to bring up her children properly. In the home the woman rules as queen and a Muslim man is in a sense the guest of his wife at home. The home and the larger family structure in which she lives are for the Muslim woman her world. To be cut off from it would be like being cut off from the world or like dying. She finds the meaning of her existence in this extended family structure which is constructed so as to give her the maximum possibility of realizing her basic needs and fulfilling herself.

The Shariah therefore envisages the role of men and women according to their nature, which is

complimentary. It gives the man the privilege of social and political authority and movement for which he has to pay by bearing heavy responsibilities, by protecting his family from all the forces and pressures of society, economic and otherwise. Although a master in the world at large and the head of his own family, the man acts in his home as one who recognize the rule of his wife, in this domain and respects it. Through mutual understanding and the realization of the responsibilities that God has placed on each other's shoulders, the Muslim man and woman are able to fulfill their personalities and create a firm family unit which is the basic structure of Muslim society.[7]

In the vehement rejection of the cultural, moral and spiritual values, indispensable for maintaining the institution of the family, those who support the Women's Liberation Movement are revolting against the whole Christian heritage of their own civilization.

Despite the evils of its feudalistic society and the abuses of the authority of the priesthood, medieval Europe enjoyed a social integration, stability, peace and harmony which is unknown to modern Europe. Here is a vivid and moving description of Christian family values practically implemented in medieval Europe as taken from the family chronicles of the famous German artist, Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) who, although a devout Christian, presents a picture of his own home life as very close to Islamic ideals.

Albrecht Durer, my beloved father, came to Germany, and stayed for a long time in the low countries, working with the great masters and finally came here to Nuremberg in the year of Our Lord 1455 on St. Eligius's day. And on this same day (June 25th) there was the wedding of Philip Pircheimer in the castle and a great reception under the big lime tree. Thenceforth, for a long time, my beloved father, Albrecht Durer served the old Hiercrnonymus Holper until the year of our Lord 1467. Then he gave him his daughter Barbara, a handsome, virtuous maid, fifteen years of age and they were married eight days before St. Vitus (June 8).

This good mother of mine bore and brought up eighteen children, often had the pestilence and many other severe illnesses, endured great poverty, ridicule, scorn, alarm, and misfortune, yet she never bore revenge. These brothers and sisters of mine, my beloved father's children, are all dead, some died young, the rest when adult. Only we three brothers are still living, so long as it may please God; namely, I, Albrecht and my brother Andreas, likewise my brother Hans. the third of that name out of my father's children.

This said Albrecht Durer, the eider, worked hard all his life and had nothing else to live on but what he earned for himself, his wife and his children with his own hands. He also had all manner of grief, temptation and adversity. And all who knew him praised him for he led an honorable Christian life, was a patient and gentle man, peaceable towards everyone and he was very thankful to God. He had little-use for society and worldly pleasures; he was also a man of few words and God fearing. My beloved father took great pains to teach his children to honor the Lord. For his greatest wish was to bring up his children well so that they would be pleasing in the sight of God and man. Therefore he continually told us to love God and behave honorably towards our fellow men.

And my father was especially fond of me for he saw that I was eager to learn. Therefore he sent me to school and when I had learnt to read and write, he cook me away from school and taught me the goldsmith's craft. And when I had mastered this, I felt that [would rather be a painter than a goldsmith. When I told my father this, he was not pleased for he grieved at the loss of time I had spent as his apprentice. But in the end, he let me have my way and in the year of our Lord 1486, on St. Andrew's day (30th November) my father hound me as apprentice to Michael Wolgemut to serve him for three years. In that time God gave me diligence and I learnt well but I also had to suffer much at the hands of his assistants.

And after I had come home, Hans Frey negotiated with my father and gave me his daughter, Agnes and with her gave me 200 forms and we were

married on Monday, July 7th before St. Margaret's day in the year 1494.

Later it happened that my father became ill with dysentery and no one could cure him. And when he saw death approaching, he submitted to it calmly and patiently and commended my mother to my care and bade us to follow in the way of the Lord. He received the last sacraments and died a Christian death, leaving my mother a sorrowing widow. He had always praised her to me exceedingly as a most godly woman. Therefore I resolved never to forsake her.

All my friends! I ask you in God's name when you read of my pious father's death to say a Paternoster and an Ave Maria for his soul and for the sake of your souls too, that we may, by serving God succeed in living a good life and dying a good death. For it is not possible that one who has led a good life should die an evil death for God is merciful.

Now you shall know that in the year 5513, on a Tuesday before Rogation, my poor mother -whom I had taken care of for nine years since she came to live with me two years after my father died when she was quite penniless - was taken so ill early in the morning that we had to break open her door - for she was too weak to let us in and that that was the only way we could get to her. We brought her downstairs and she received both sacraments for everyone knew she was about to die. She had never been well since my father died.

More than a year from the said day on which she fell ill, in the year of our Lord, May 17, 1514, two hours before dark, my pious mother, Barbara Durer departed from this life with all the sacraments, absolved from pain and sin by papal authority. Before she died, she gave me her blessing and wished me divine peace with much good advice to guard myself from Sm. And she was most afraid of death but she said she was not afraid to meet God. And my mother's death grieved me more than I can say. May God have mercy on her soul ! It was always her greatest pleasure to speak of God and see that we honored Him. And it was her custom. to go regularly to church and she always scolded me heavily when I did wrong. And she was always anxious lest I or my brothers should sin. And whenever I went out or came in, she would say, "God be with you !" And she constantly gave us solemn warning and had continual concern for our souls. And I cannot say enough about her good works and the kindness she showed to everybody or of her good name.

And it was in her sixty-third year when she died. And I buried her fittingly in accordance with my means. May the Lord grant me that I too die a Christian death and that I may join Him and His Heavenly Host, my father, my mother and my friends and may Almighty God give us eternal life! Amen. And in death she looked far sweeter than when she was still alive.[8]

A uni-sexual society be proposed be the feminists - that is, a society which makes no cultural or social distinction between the sexes, a society without marriage, home and family, where modesty, chastity and motherhood are scorned, does not represent "progress" or "liberation" but degradation at its worst. The result is pure and unadulterated anarchy, confusion and chaos.

If so, why is Feminism so popular?

The social order founded on materialism is the oldest and most popular. No social order is more satisfying, none so easy to evolve and so readily acceptable to the majority of men in all climes and at all times. It has such a deep attraction for the masses that its roots need not go deep into the soil nor is it necessary to raise the level of human intelligence or make any sacrifice for its sake. One requires no altruism or endurance. One need only drift with the "times." History bears witness to the fact that no social order has so persistently come to have its sway over humanity as it has done.[9]

Never has moral corruption and social decadence menaced mankind on such a universal scale as is the case now. The adoption of feminist ideals degrades humans lower than the animals. For animals live by their instincts and cannot do anything opposed to their nature. Among animals, homosexuality is unknown. The male is only attracted to the female of its own species. The male

animal never goes with lust to another male or a female to another female. Among animals, the maternal relationship is completely severed as soon as the young are able to look after themselves. In most species, the father takes no interest in its offspring. There is no such thing as modesty, chastity, marriage or filial ties among. beasts. These concepts are unique with human beings. They are found in every culture at every stage of civilization and history. The feminists wish to abolish the very characteristics, which make man human and undermine the foundation of all his relationships and social ties. The result will be suicide, not only of a single nation as in the past, but of the entire human race.

END NOTES

[1] The Rebirth of Feminism, Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, The New York Tomies, New York, 1971, pp. 228

[2] Ibid, p.240.

[3] The New Woman; A Motive Anthology on Women's Liberation, edited by Joanne Cooke and Charlotte Bunch-Weeks, New York, 1970. pp. 79-81.

[4] Ibid., p.122-125.

[5] Women in the Modern World, edited by Raphael Palai. The Free Press, New York 1967.

[6] Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam, Sayyid Abul 'Ala Maudooda, Islamic Publications, Lahore, 1972, pp. 52-53.

[7] Ideals and Realities of Islam, Syed Hossein Nasr, George AIlen & Unwin, London, 1966, pp. 110-113.

[8] The Durer House in Nuremberg: Extracts from Durer's Family Chronicles and Reminiscences, English translation by John M. Woolman, Nuremberg. pp. 34-46.

[9] Religion and Civilization, Abul Hasan All Nadawi, Academy of Islamic Research and 8 Publications, Lucknow, 1970, p. 45.